

Young People's Priorities for the Committee in the 6th Senedd

Children, Young People and Education Committee

January 2022

Over the summer of 2021 the Children, Young People and Education Committee (*Committee* hereafter) conducted an open consultation aiming to understand stakeholders priorities for the Committee during the length of 6th Senedd term. A summary of the responses was prepared by Senedd Research.

In October 2021, the committee agreed to seek the views of children and young people to further understand the issues that they care about and to inform the Committee's strategic plan.

Due to a breadth of consultation data available in the public domain from engagement conducted with 12 year olds and older (*young people* hereafter), a focused consultation was conducted with 11 year olds and under (*children* hereafter) to fulfil a knowledge gap and therefore have the biggest impact on informing the committee.

To ensure the voices of all ages were heard, the Committee also agreed to speak with one group of young people.



Methodology

The approach conducted for this piece of work facilitated conversations to enable the gathering of information about children's lives and their perspectives. It was primarily a qualitative approach. Using the following principles from participatory frameworks, engagement was designed to:

- **Ensure a safe and communicative space**, where participants didn't feel there was a 'right' or 'wrong' answer to the questions they were being asked as they might be used to this from within a school setting.
- **Include groups that were less visible either generally within Committee consultation or from the research already undertaken**. This was achieved by targeting an under 12 age group and only involving one group of young people. Also, all three schools groups were from schools offering Free School Meals to over 40% of their pupils.
- **Offer a range of options for engagement** that suited individual participants, for example, this approach allowed participants to contribute visually, verbally, in writing or by drawing.

Sample

Seven sessions were held with **127** children and young people. Audiences included:

- **Home Educated children and young people**. A drop-in session was held in the National Botanical Garden of Wales and facilitated by Senedd staff.
- **Primary school educated children**. Three classroom based environment led sessions were conducted by Senedd staff or school staff. Participants came from the following schools; Ysgol Ffordd Dyffryn, Llandudno; Trinant Primary School, Caerphilly and; Ringland Primary, Newport.
- **Nursery school children**. Two nursery based sessions were conducted by nursery staff within the setting and in their local area. Participants came from Thornhill Playgroup, Cwmbran.
- **Young people**. A virtual session was conducted by two Members of the Senedd and supported by Senedd staff. Participants came from The Wales Federation of Young Farmers Clubs (YFC hereafter).

For the style of this approach this sample size should provide enough data to address the aims of this work and complement existing all Wales based research.

Approach

Each group was invited to take part face to face. In total three sessions were delivered by Senedd staff face to face. Two were delivered digitally by Senedd staff and two were delivered by the setting. The two sessions delivered by the setting occurred in the

nursery setting, an approach recommended for this age group as introducing a new person to very young participants can be distracting and affect the collection of genuine results.

Each group session plan was developed around the following overarching questions:

1. If you could make a “perfect vision of Wales” what would you include?
2. What are your favourite things about Wales? And why do you like them?
3. What don't you like about Wales and why would you want to see less of this?
4. What would you change about Wales if you could?

In advance of the session, each group was invited to answer these questions with photography. At each session, other than the virtual event with YFC, A0 maps of Wales and paper people were used as a resource to promote the sharing of their thoughts on these questions. You can see images of some of the maps in Appendix A.

During each session staff would explore the reasoning around what the young people were creating asking non-leading questions. Verbatim quotes were collected to add context to their picture making, mark making and map making. This allowed the young people to analyse their thoughts and opinions and then verbalise them.

Member involvement and attendance at face to face sessions was limited by the ongoing Covid regulations. However, Jayne Brant MS (Chair of the Committee) and James Evans MS (A member of the Committee) were able to attend the virtual session held with YFC.

Key Findings

The data collected at each session has been analysed and the key findings illustrated below. Key themes were identified as most prevalent themes emerging from the data. Several of the themes link with Articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Verbatim quotes are highlighted in grey boxes. Themes are displayed in order of the highest prevalence first:

Environmental Concerns

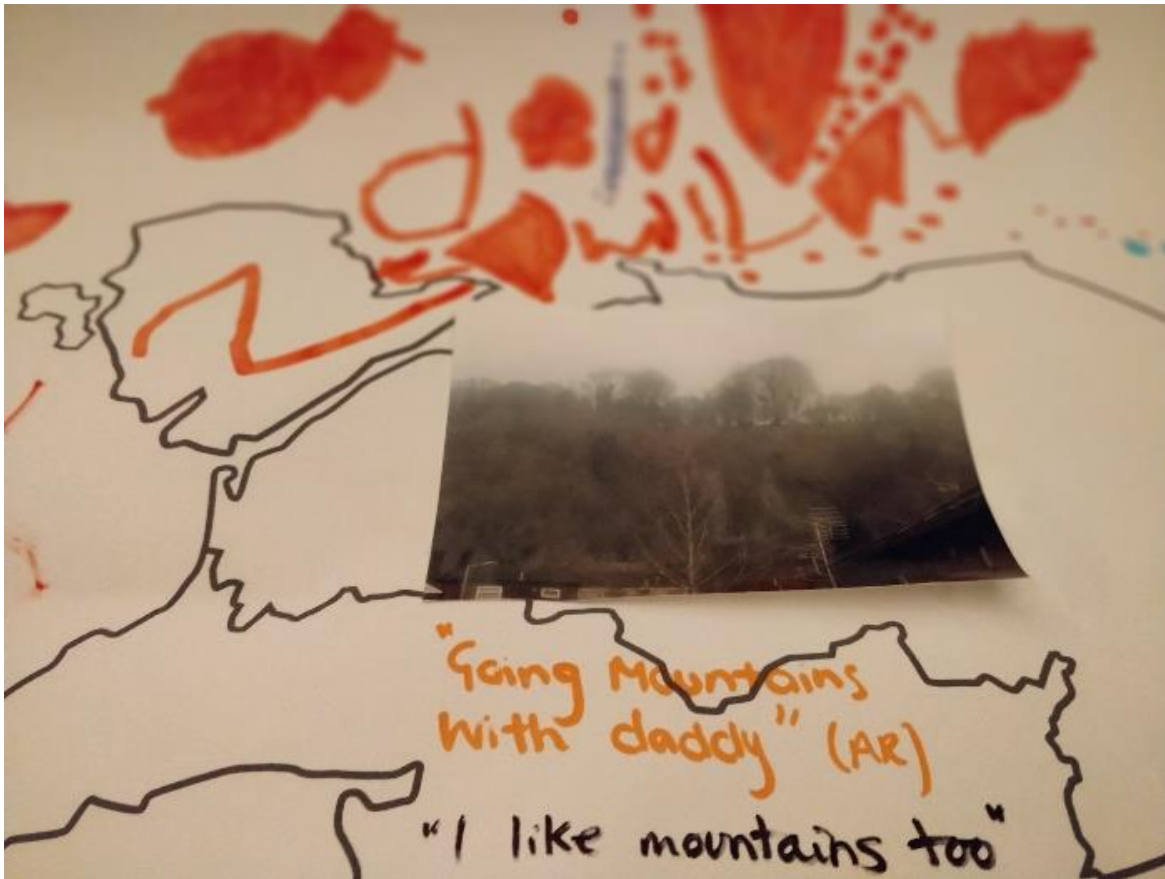
Article 12: Your right to say what you think should happen and be listened to.

Environmental concerns were the primary focus on almost all of the maps as well as raised at the virtual session with YFC and illustrated with photographic images.

Comments could be divided into:

- a) those that demonstrated awareness and appreciation of the environment, nature and wildlife;

Within the nursery setting two children liked the mountains nearby and commented ‘going mountains with daddy’ and ‘I like mountains too’.



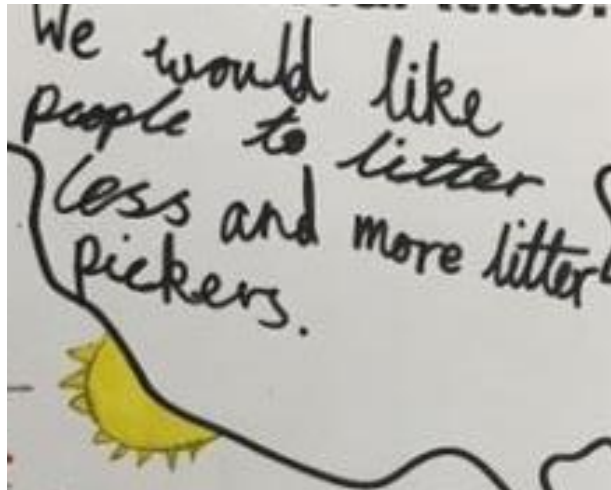
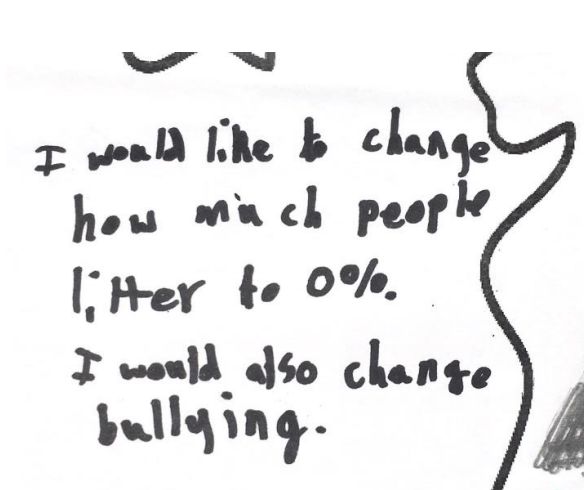
Participants from the schools took pictures in their local areas of natural beauty and mentioned beauty spots they liked to visit.



Wild and captive animals also featured within the images:



b) appeals for improvements to cleanliness in their local area;



Participants in the school drew pictures of litter and shared concerns about the amount in their areas. There was a particular focus on plastics.

Within the nursery setting several children were in agreement that they did not like rubbish and one child said 'rubbish go in bin'.

Dog waste was verbally mentioned several times and photographed once by the children. Only one photo was added to the map (nursery staff commented that 'the map would be covered in poo photos otherwise!') One child commented 'yuck poo!' 'Rubbish go in bin', 'rubbish don't go in there' and 'might tread in it' in reference to dog waste.



Comments to support concerns to the local environment from other children and young people were:

There's litter everywhere and we need more bins. – child aged 9-11

We went out to pick up litter on a litter hunt and picked up so many bags full of plastic. – child aged 9-11

Keep Seas / Beaches clean - Home schooled participant

(Facilitator asked: What don't you like about Wales?) The rubbish because it's effecting all the animals. – child aged 9-11

(Facilitator asked: What don't you like about Wales?) Firstly we have litter, if it goes into the sea it can make our planet more polluted. It can cause more fires, cause more storms that affect us. (Facilitator asked: Where is the litter?) We are one of the best for not littering but I do see when people come out of the shop they just drop their papers on the floor from their things. (Facilitator asked: What can we do about this, what are your ideas?) Maybe add a little bit less plastic to things so some things can come in cardboard or other things because there are lots of plastic things in the shops when you walk in. – child aged 9-11

Stop using plastic, give people a fine for littering and there could be cameras everywhere on every street. – child aged 9-11

We can't ban plastic, we probably still need to use it for different things don't we, but you can get rid of some of it but don't think all of it. We need to be first

in the world for recycling so there is like no litter in the streets anymore. – child aged 9-11

C) And; appeals for action against things that children and young people felt were damaging to the environment.

Comments collected from the maps or shared verbally included:

Stop killing animals and stop using plastic straws – child aged 9-11

Get rid of some plastics – child aged 9-11

Easier ways to recycle and less plastic packaging in Welsh supermarkets - Home school participant

More trees, we shouldn't cut down all the trees. – child aged 9-11

(Facilitator asked: What don't you like about Wales?) Deforestation (Facilitator asked: In Wales or in the world?) In the world (Facilitator asked: Does it affect us here in Wales?) Yes (Facilitator asked: What should we be doing?) Instead of cutting down trees we should be planting – child aged 9-11

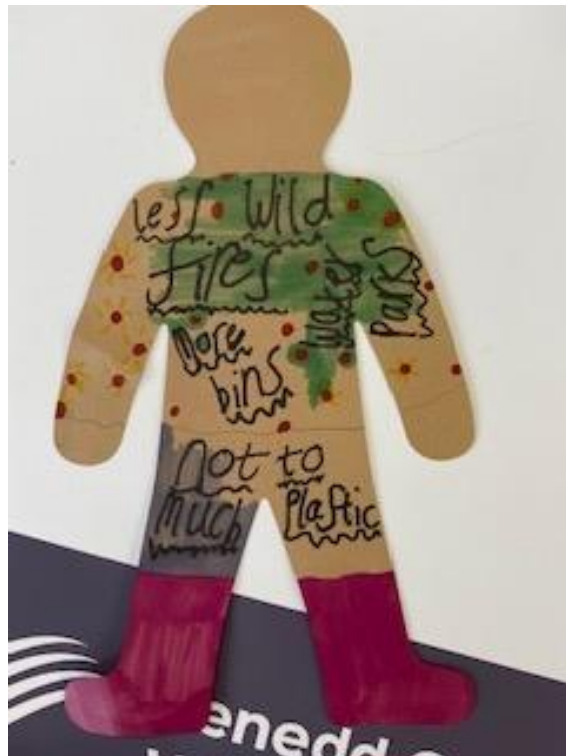
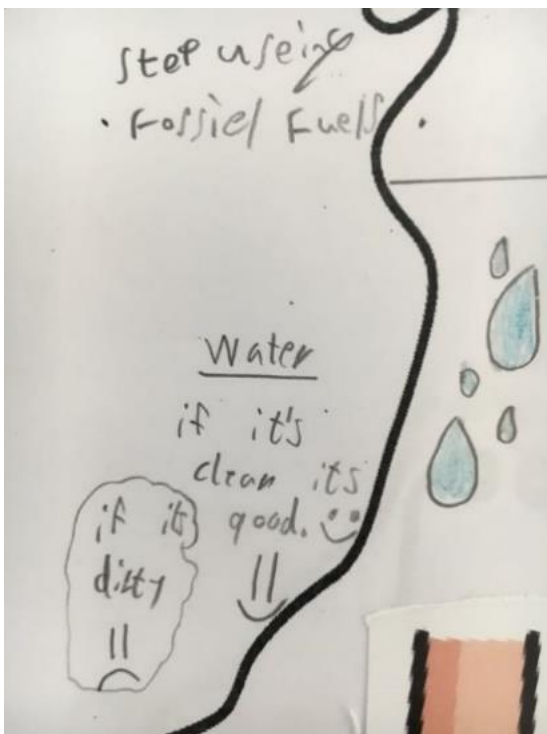
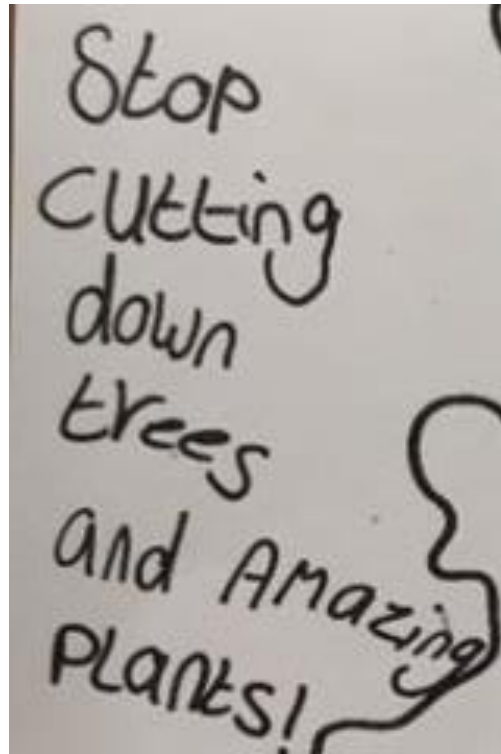
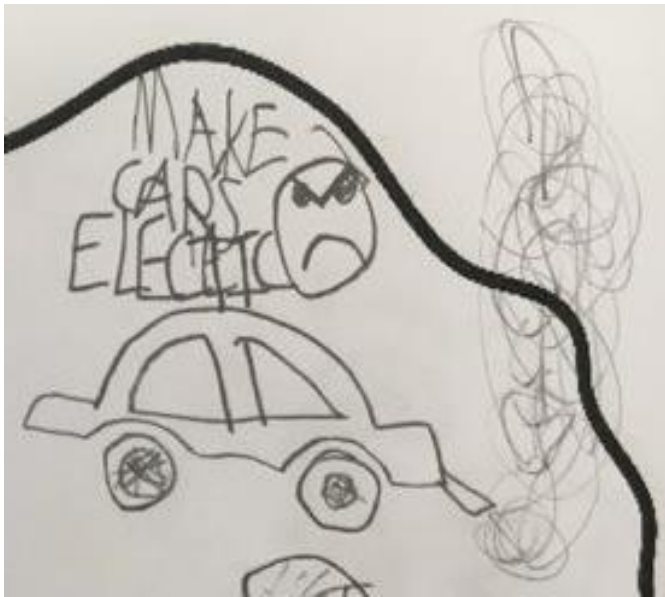
Less wildfires because we have lots of wildfires up on the mountain. They kill the animals and are dangerous for all the people. – child aged 9-11

(Facilitator asked: What don't you like about Wales?) Cars, I don't like them because they cause pollution. More cycling and walking to School, electric cars not gas or fossil fuel. – child aged 9-11

Green Cars only – less building roads - Home schooled participant

I think things like the 5p bag tax does make a lot of difference because before that was in place I can remember going on holiday in England and there was just so much plastic waste compared to Wales. I think it's important we think more about the environment as much now as we did when the 5p bag tax came in. We've got so such a nice environment and landscapes in Wales. I think we do do quite a bit too. But I think there's more we can do. – Participant from YFC

These images were collected from the school sessions:



Participants from schools shared images they'd taken of litter in their area and the presence of renewable energy sources in their local area:



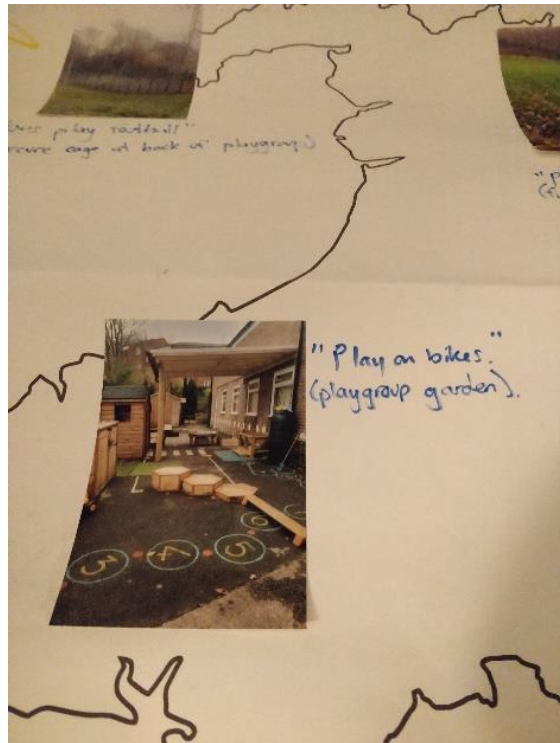
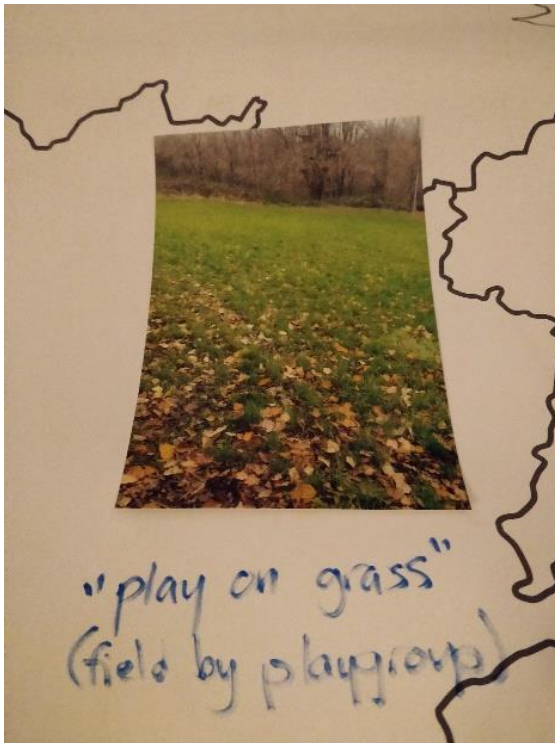
Security in the context of relaxing and playing

Article 31: Your right to relax and play.

Children and young people across many groups expressed how important play was to them.

Words that sum up my best of Wales – freedom, creativity, resilience - Home school participant

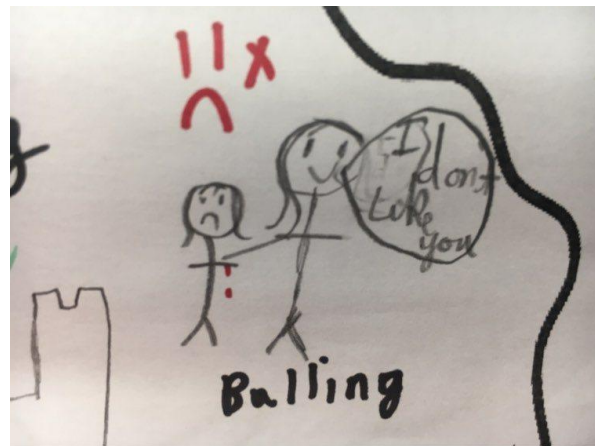
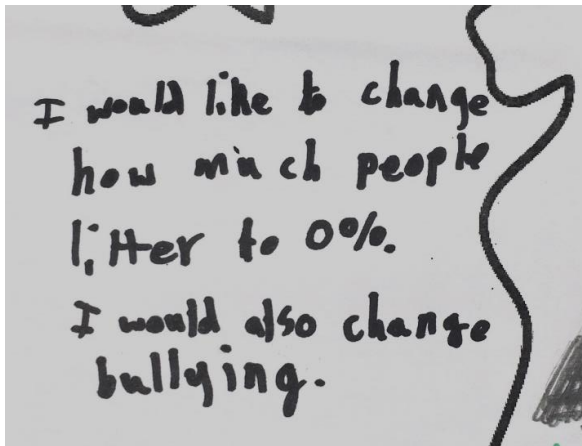
In the nursery sessions there was a clear theme of play and enjoyment at the nursery and in their local area.. The children wanted to take a photo of the playgroup garden saying 'I play in mud'. One of the older children wanted a picture in front of the 'big butterfly' and the other children joined in saying 'play with toys', 'do pictures' and 'stickers'.



However some participants struggled to find places to play for various reasons:

I don't really go out because there's not much to do and my Mam might be moving again. I have three friends, I did have friends before I moved. I moved a lot of times (over 5). I want to make more friends and I'd like to talk to my old friends too. I don't really want to move again. – child aged 9-11

The participants in schools shared experiences and perspectives on when those spaces or their personal safety felt under threat:



There's lots of fighting around here. It's like the Hood up here. It's all the naughty teenagers. They spray spray-paint all over the place and they ruined our swings and jumped all over them. They tell us to get off the swings. They can go far away and not destroy the children's parks. – child aged 9-11

I want a skatepark that doesn't get wrecked by the teenagers, they keep digging it up and trying to set fire to it. – child aged 9-11

Within the nursery session, one child said 'he parked there' pointing out that there was very little space for staff and children to pass by safely on the path:





Other children pointed out overgrown bushes meaning children were unable to walk down a path without moving onto the grass (when holding hands in pairs) 'didn't like the prickles'.

Many children and young people requested an increase in the number, variety and quality of spaces to spend time with family, with particular reference to outside spaces and local parks:



I want more places to go to like places to go on walks with my family. Like Pen y Fan Pond because it's not next to the road. – child aged 9-11

I like indoor places like a museum and trampoline parks. I like going places with my family. – child aged 9-11

Culture 😊 – Better access please but love the opportunities in Wales, castles, theatres, dancing – Home school participant

Health – including access to good physical and mental health

Article 6: You have the right to life and to grow up to be healthy.

At the virtual session with YFC, mental health was discussed in detail. **Isolation as a result of the pandemic, social media and child poverty were identified by young people as instigators for poor mental health.** (Please see the “Diversity and Inclusion” section for data on child poverty):

Mental health support is something I'm really passionate about. In my undergraduate dissertation I wrote about how in general we [society] think it's older people that don't want to come forward and talk about it – perhaps because of a stiff upper lip attitude. However my research actually found it was young people who had more stigma towards it despite being educated on it so much more. – Participant from YFC

COVID has affected levels of mental health. Mental health has been heightened because of isolation. We've been behind computers and the isolation of being away from family and so forth has exacerbated the problem. – Participant from YFC

Social media plays a huge role in young people's mental health – but unfortunately I don't see how we can really police it easily. There are some obvious approaches out there. Like encouraging the young people to unfollow people who don't make them feel happy. But at the end of the day who's actually gone through their social media and taken out the people who don't make them feel good. It's such a big thing in our lives and it's going to be our lives now forever. – Participant from YFC

Unfortunately, we're seeing much more of this issue [poor mental health] than we are seeing the positive sides of social media. – Participant from YFC

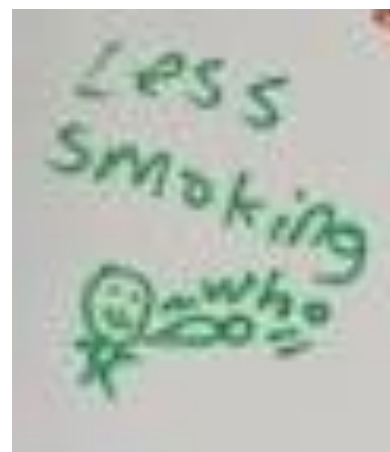
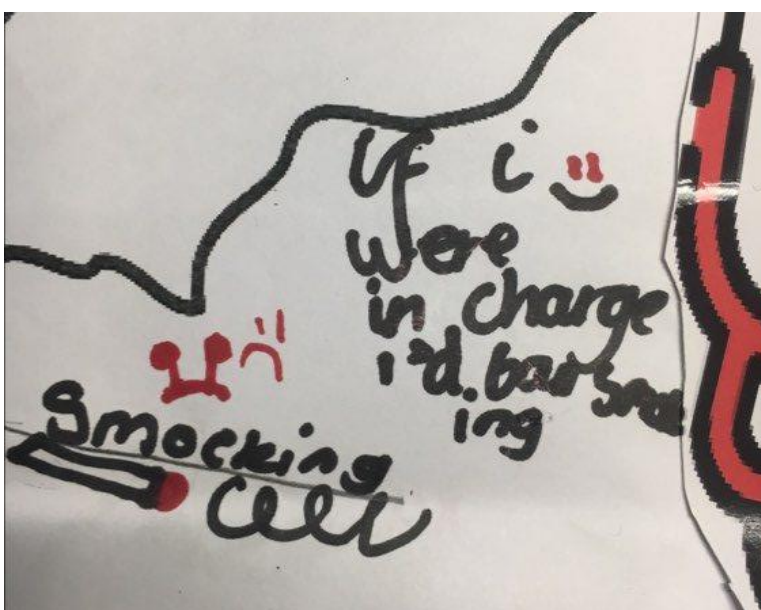
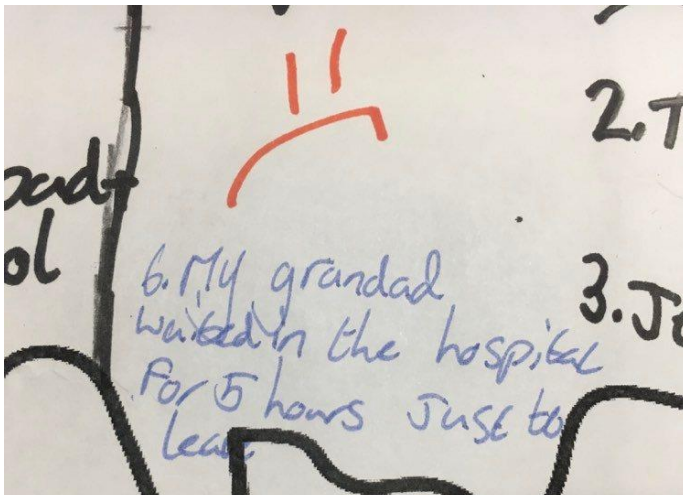
One thing that I would change if I could, if I had a magic power, is that people can only post their real life rather than their ideal vision [...] we [social media users] end up comparing ourselves and feeling hopeless. – Participant from YFC

Participants suggested **nature** could help mitigate poor mental health:

I love the countryside and beaches – more people should spend more time outside in my opinion – makes people happy! – Home school participant

People can go out to nature they hear the birds singing it helps them calm. – child aged 9-11

References were made by school participants about **waiting times** and their **dislike of smoking** and under the map titled “what would you change in Wales?” one home schooled participant said “**More Carers**” and “**More Male Carers!**”:



Smoking can affect your health, I know it's addictive but it shouldn't be if it affects your health. Why should it be there at all because it's affecting your lungs. – child aged 9-11

(Facilitator asked: What would you like to change?) When you go to into hospital there are gigantic ques. – child aged 9-11

Access to services

Article 29: Your right to become the best that you can be.

Closures of services and centralisation of facilities, lack of affordable homes and poor internet connection were among a range of things that young people felt held them back from being the best they could.

Participants from the YFC group felt that **the future of Wales should focus on children and young people primarily**. Ensuring this group has the security and support to be able to grow up and live in their local area as they felt a lot of services are being centralised or closed. This was echoed by some younger participants who were aware of hospital closures or the need to have services more locally:

I think young farmers have a vision of a better Wales for the future of young people [...] We need to make sure that the future is safe and secure for them in regards to being able to work in agriculture. A lot of young people are moving away from agriculture and moving away from rural areas because they're not able to afford to live in rural areas [...] We've heard of local small schools closing, and we are losing those communities in those areas. I know my local school here has closed and it does feel that you lose the community. – Participant from YFC

I think that it's important to have something to still bring those young people back into those areas. – Participant from YFC

I put a school on the map too so I can walk to it and my dad has to get up really early in the morning to travel to work. I'd like it if we had everything so we could walk there like a local school and jobs. - child aged 9-11

There was a sense that **participants were grateful for their rural surroundings** but also that they **wanted a good balance with sharing it with people who come from outside the area**. Their reasons for this were to ensure respect for the area and the safety of local people and the economy.

I'm lucky in the area I live in. I live in a rural area of Wales and we've been very very lucky throughout COVID. That's made me appreciate much more of what I have around me. – Participant from YFC

(Facilitator asked: How do you feel living here in the summer?) The summer has loads of great things but way too many tourists. – child aged 9-11

We want our town not to be so messy. Tourists come and leave their rubbish - child aged 9-11

The group shared **dismay at the infrastructure around internet access in rural areas**. They explained how this is prohibiting their lives and ability to stay in these rural areas due to the lack of being able to work successfully from home, something they have observed is more of a norm these days. They also raised concerns of personal safety when they had a lack of signal in rural areas:

Internet access will be something that affects young people's decision to stay in rural areas. Unless we can get that sorted, people are really going to have to move away from those areas due to not being able to work from home as well as someone in urban areas. – Participant from YFC

What I don't like about Wales is the whole Internet and phone signal thing. As someone who works from home at the moment, it's a pain in my bum sometimes. But also, it made me feel less safe going on walks in my area [...] Sometimes this stopped me from going on those walks. – Participant from YFC

Issues around affordable housing were raised with concerns about young people having to leave the areas that they have grown up in:

I think that's very important during the next five years in the Senedd that Members make sure that young people are looked after and young people that have been in those areas over the years are able to stay in those areas. Or rural Wales is going to be more like an old age pensioners area. There is room for both age groups in every area, but I think the priority for support needs to be the younger generation for the future of Wales going forward. – Participant from YFC

Being 22 years old now I'm in the typical age group to look to buy a house but with rising house prices and so forth it is proving very difficult. I know this issue may be difficult to sort out over five years because that's a big job, but I can see it's only getting harder and harder, with holidaymakers coming in all the time. Boosted prices with second homes. It's a hard thing to balance in Wales

because we don't want to segregated ourselves away from the rest of the country. We want people to come in. We want that economic support and money from those holidaymakers. But we don't want those people taking our houses. – Participant from YFC

One participant explained they felt they were at a disadvantage due to becoming a professional even though this was what society needs. This meant they have **'lost their independence'**:

As someone who went to university and therefore didn't have a wage from 16 straight through to what am I now (22) it makes it even harder to buy a house. My brother is hardly 20 years old, and he's buying a house at the moment but it's only because he worked straight from coming out of school. Because I went to university I'm at a disadvantage even though I've got a professional job. I've lost out on my independence because I'm still at home. Perhaps this is a reflection on current wages too. As I'm doing jobs that are stuck on minimum wage. We [society] make it hard for people who go to university to come out the other end financially successful but we [society] need people to go to university to come out with these degrees and training skills because these people are then the future for tomorrow. They will be those teachers teaching children. – Participant from YFC

Education and Welsh language

Article 28: Your right to learn and go to school.

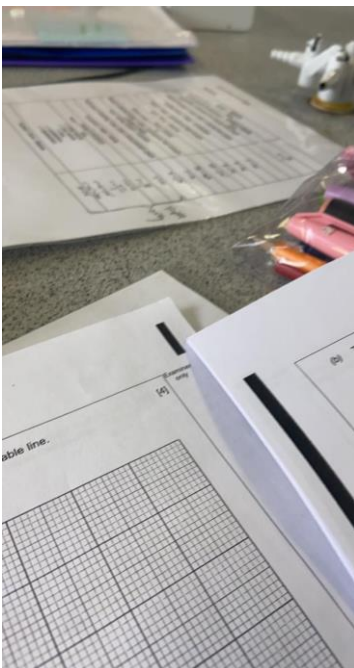
In general young people expressed their satisfaction with their education.

Our school has a lot of energy, it's nice and positive, they are nice when people are sad – child aged 9-11

Below is a reversible paper person that one participant created of their 'superhero teacher':



A YFC member submitted this photograph saying schools are something that they like about Wales:



Home school educated participants wanted to see **more long term funding for home education** and they requested **free exams** and **free Welsh language lessons**.

Apprenticeships were discussed at the YFC session. Participants felt although they are necessary they need more structure and **should be assessed by demand from the perspective of the employer and apprentice**:

I think apprenticeships are a vital part of rural areas to be honest. With apprenticeships, it's getting the correct apprenticeships in the correct places. Because we're seeing a lot of people that are going for apprenticeships but they might not be old enough to drive. They might be old enough to drive but can't. Catching a bus at the correct time to the correct place is, well, completely impossible in our area anyway. They usually don't turn it or they turn up two hours too late. - Participant from YFC

Social media was also discussed with the emphasis to **include it in the curriculum** in order to mitigate poor mental health:

I definitely think it's important for social media to be part of the curriculum, but I have I worked in a school where time was set aside for talking about this topic, but their form tutor was an old man who clearly didn't understand social media and it's affects. So it's important to get the balance of how to get that message across right and getting the children to actually take notice of it. – Participant from YFC

Young people were positive about Welsh language education:

We want more Welsh language to be included in the world. – child aged 9-11
Love the language!!! More Welsh activities. – Home school participant

Diversity and Inclusion

Article 3: Everyone who works with children should always do what is best for each child.

The topics of **racism** and **gender balance** occurred in several groups, mainly with requests to '**stop racism**' or where participants wanted to highlight that they **felt these topics are 'still' a problem**. Occurrences were verbal and visual:



I want more inclusivity for gender and races – Home schooled YP

I said black lives matter because it's important. – child aged 9-11

I think in schools they [poorer families and children] can be treated differently. From my experience, maybe the school isn't looking out for them as much as other pupils because they've got special education needs and so forth, they then end up with adverse situations when they're older and then unfortunately cost Wales extra money because society should have intervened earlier rather than intervening at crisis point. – Participant from YFC

Inclusivity is not just about in schools. It includes the community. It includes us as a younger generation and the older generations living in rural communities. -Participant from YFC

I've seen a big change in women in agriculture during the last five to 10 years. I think the appreciation of the work women do within agriculture is getting closer to being level with men. [...] We've seen the unions doing a lot of work showing what women do in agriculture. However in my opinion we shouldn't

have to be doing that, we should be on level playing fields by now and it doesn't matter what sex you are because at the end of the day we can all do the work. I'm glad to say that it is going in the right direction. -Participant from YFC

Also, in reference to **Article 27: Your right to a good standard of living**, child poverty was discussed. Children were **concerned child poverty is still prevalent** and they expressed how they felt it was affecting children and young people today:

I think it's bad that some children don't have money for a bike. – child aged 9-11

I have to cycle to get to school, it's ok the traffic isn't bad. More should cycle to school but not everyone can afford a bike, we should do something about that. – child aged 9-11

Make more jobs and give more money (Facilitator asked: What do you mean more and better paid jobs?) Yes, so that people don't get homeless so that they can afford what they need. – child aged 9-11

I feel like COVID has segregated people from being people who can afford a laptop, and people who can't, especially for young people. When they don't have a laptop they can't pick up their school work so easily making it more difficult when they go back to school. I work in a school and I have seen how far behind some children have been because of not being able to afford a laptop and that really affects their mental health, not just because they can see they are behind, but because they can see, that they can't afford one like other people. They know they have missed out on two months of education and are asking themselves "Where am I going to be in the future? What's the point in trying for my future?" And this attitude can spiral. – Participant from YFC

Transport and Connectivity

Participants wanted improved public transport, with particular reference given to **better train infrastructure, public transport and increased electric cars** (see comments above):





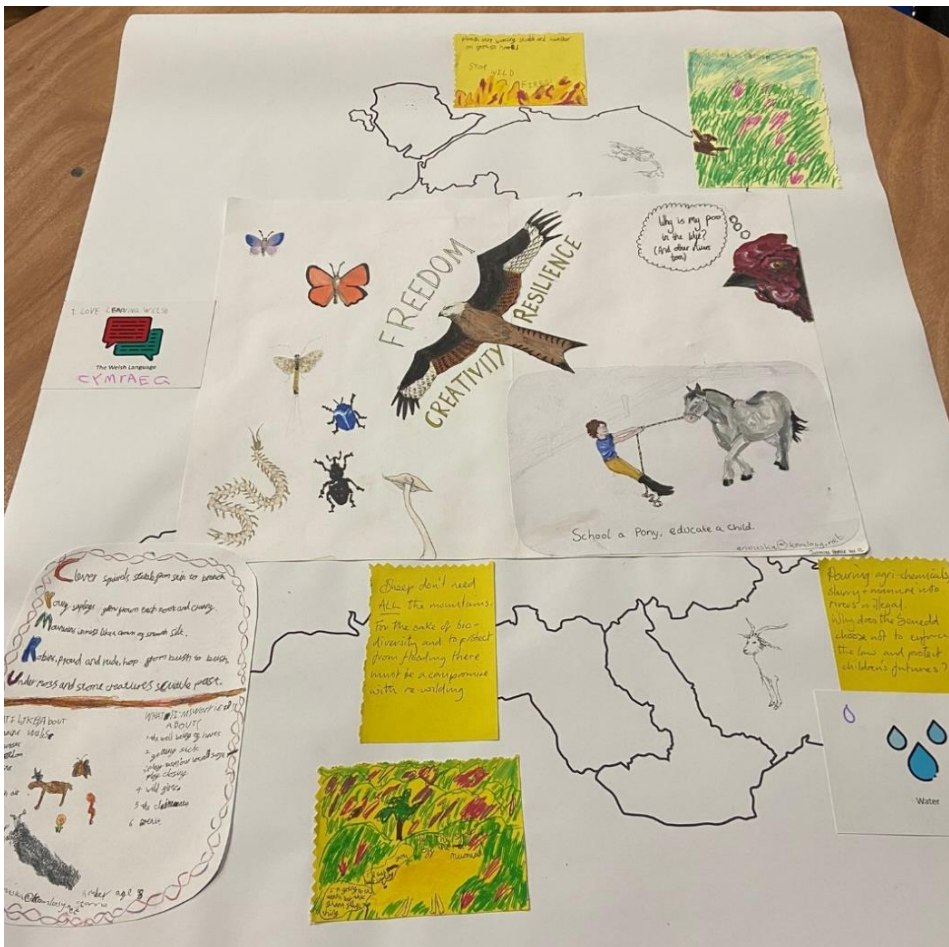
This quote related to the map above on the left:

We need better trains and roads. We put more train places on our map so people can get the train instead of driving. We made it so all the tracks all over Wales connect up. – child aged 9-11

There were also references to north and south road connections (see map above and on the right):

I went up to North Wales for a big bike ride. It took forever and the road was really bad to get there. – child aged 9-11

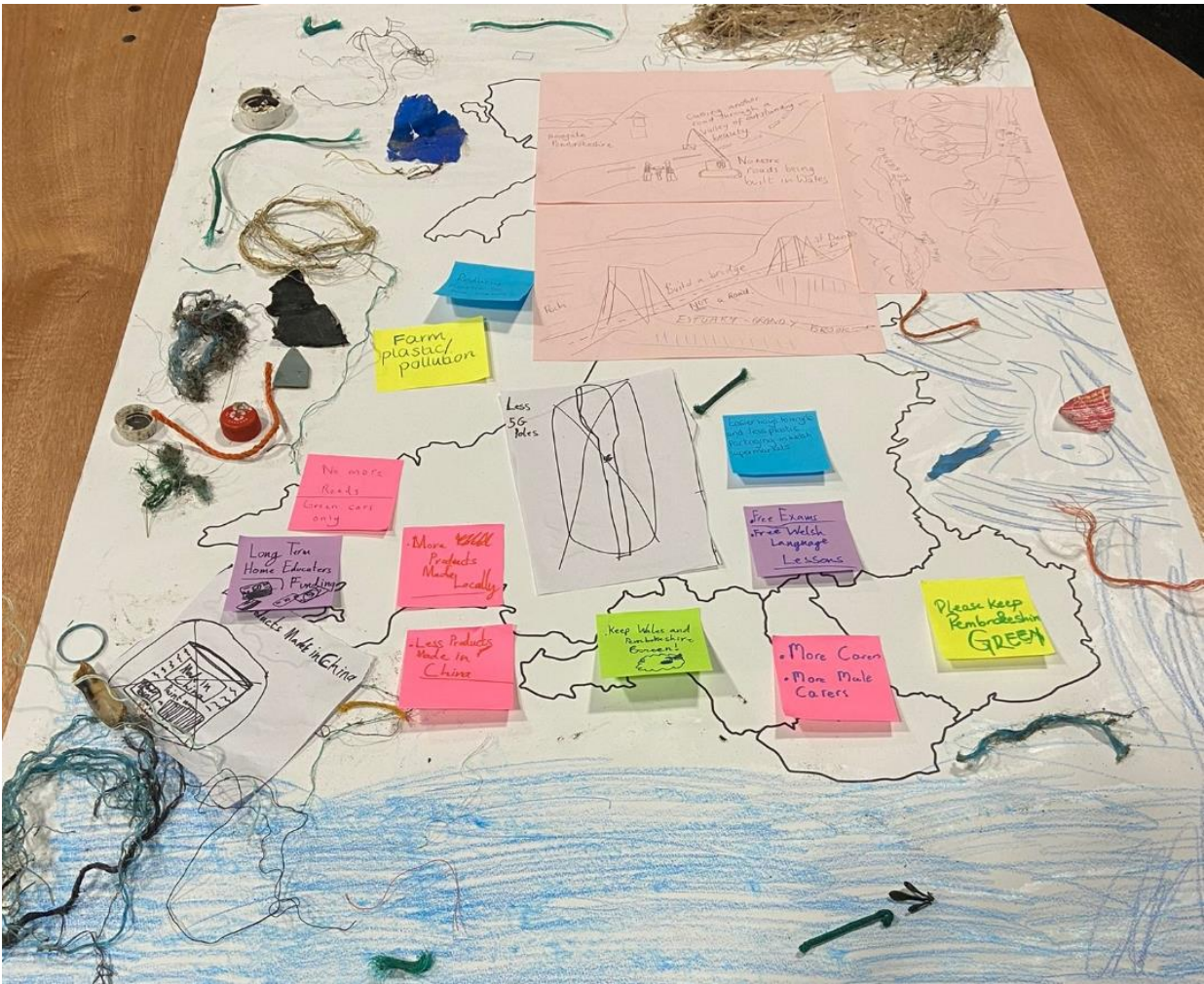
Appendix A:



Above: Map making example from home school group

Below: Detailed shot of map making example with home school group





Above: Map making example from home school group

Below: Above: Map making example from nursery setting





Above and Below: Map making examples from school groups

